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Senate Panel Seeks Action to Outlaw Unmasking Agents

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate Intelligence Committee has expressed alarm over a spate of disclosures about the names of CIA officers abroad and asked for quick floor action on a bill to outlaw the practice.

In letters to Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) and Minority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), the committee's eight Republicans and seven Democrats urged "that there be no further delay in bringing this vital legislation to the floor . . ."

The bill would make it a crime to reveal information that identifies undercover U.S. intelligence agents, informants or "sources of operational assistance," even if the information is gleaned from public documents.

The Senate Judiciary Committee approved it Oct. 6, but it has been held up, partly because of the press of other legislation, partly because of "holds" placed on it by objecting senators.

The Intelligence panel, which had primary jurisdiction over the proposal last year, said it was concerned by the publication three weeks ago in the Covert Action Information Bulletin of the names of 69 alleged CIA officers in 45 countries abroad.

"In addition," the senators said in their letters, "the Bulletin reprinted the names of 272 alleged covert agents which had been identified in the 12 previous editions of the magazine."

The anti-CIA periodical said in a lead editorial that the issue would mark "our last 'Naming Names' column for some time" because of the imminence of the legislation, which is known as the Intelligence Identities Protection Act.

Intelligence Committee members also expressed concern over the recent publication in Nicaragua's pro-Sandinist newspaper, Nuevo Diario, of the names of 13 alleged CIA officers stationed in Managua. "Several of those named [in Nicaragua] have already received death threats, and the families of a number of these American officials have been evacuated for their personal safety," the senators said. "U.S. officials in Managua believe the publication of these names is linked with the visit of Philip Agee to Nicaragua last month."

Agee is a former CIA officer and renegade who has made a career of exposing agency personnel and operations abroad. He is also a member of the Covert Action Information Bulletin's Board of Advisers.

The House has already passed a stiff identities bill that would make even negligent disclosures a crime. The Senate Judiciary Committee's version would penalize journalists and others outside government channels only if they acted with specific "intent to impair or impede" U. S. intelligence activities through their disclosures.